

FOR A NEW APPROACH TO OUR CONCENTRATION TASKS

By: Alex Parker

(The following is an extract from the organizational report delivered at the recent National Conference of the Communist Party.)

The main political report and the resolution of the National Committee analyzing the elections have placed before the Party the role the working class must play in building a new people's coalition. The recognition of its role in this post-war period has been understood by the leadership since the 1945 convention which wrested the Party from the revisionist hands of Browder.

Commenting on the leading role of the working class, Comrade Eugene Dennis at the 1948 convention had the following to say: "To halt the drive toward fascism and war, the new people's coalition must be led by the working class and its most class conscious section."

Acting on that understanding, Comrade Henry Winston declared:

The central task before the Party is the fight for shifting the main base of our Party to the working class. This cannot be done unless we turn the face of the entire Party to the workers in the factories.

At the 1950 Convention concentration on the working class was posed sharply. The Resolution adopted by that Convention, among other things, stated:

The Party National Convention calls upon the whole Party to establish guarantees that a real policy of industrial concentration will be carried forward, and that major attention is given to the workers in the stronghold of trustified capital, which happens also to be the stronghold of the reactionary labor officialdom. For by winning the workers in these industries we will be influencing the thinking and actions of the entire labor movement. A thorough shaking up is required in the Party on this score. The base of the Party is not yet sufficiently among factory workers. Also, the fact that the Party is not yet predominantly composed of industrial workers becomes in itself a factor tending to pull the Party away from its concentration plans, year after year. (Emphasis added)

Developing this question further, Comrade Winston said in his report to that Convention:

And what does "thorough shake-up" mean? It means that an immediate and drastic change must be made on all levels of leadership so that 90% of its work is devoted to the task of uniting the ranks of the workers, and winning them for support of our Party's policies.

A number of years have passed since these objectives were placed before the Party. Today we are entering upon a decisive phase of the struggle against the forces of reaction--the forces of war and fascism. We cannot stress too much the supreme importance of labor's role in the struggles that are now unfolding. It is in order to pause in these current discussions and assess how the decisions of the 1948 and 1950 conventions have been carried out.

What is the situation in regard to our industrial concentration?

In an overall sense, the placing of the problem of concentration at the 1948 and 1950 conventions in the excellent reports of Comrade Winston (incidentally, let me urge all Party members to re-read these reports) has borne some fruit. These reports, and the program of activities they outlined, were aimed at eliminating the disastrous effects of Browder revisionism which had resulted in the liquidation of shop club organizations and the serious weakening of the Party's connections with the workers in the mass production industries. Even in 1948, three years after the re-constitution of the Party, while considerable headway had been made in restoring the vanguard character of our Party, the fact remained that little headway had been made to root our Party among the industrial workers. These Convention reports and decisions contributed greatly in orienting the Party on the working class and enhancing the Party's vanguard role among the workers. Many of the positive developments in the labor movement can be traced directly to the role our Party played in this period.

However, despite many positive achievements, the main decisions of the 1948 and 1950 Conventions have yet to be realized. The Party is not based predominantly on industrial workers. On the contrary, there has been a serious decline of industrial workers in the past several years. During the registration of 1950, which revealed serious liquidationist tendencies in the Party, our industrial losses were the greatest. The fluctuation of the membership during these years has been highest in such key industrial centers as Ohio, Illinois, Western Pennsylvania, and Michigan. Undoubtedly, objective conditions have had a great deal to do with these losses, but it is a fact that the districts did not do all that was possible to halt such trends.

To this day, a large percentage of industrial workers employed in industry are not organized for work in the shops. In the New York districts, for example, only 5% of the membership is organized in shop clubs. In the

Michigan district, where our Party registered its greatest successes in applying its concentration policy, too many auto workers are still in community clubs and are not geared for work in the auto industry. In Los Angeles, 25% of the membership are industrial workers, yet, only half of them are organized for work in their industry. The trend in these districts exists in varying degrees in almost all districts. Thus, we find a paradoxical situation. On the one hand we have called on the entire Party to turn its face toward industry, and years later, a large percentage of our members who are already in industry, are not organized for work there. This is one of the unsolved tasks which this meeting must place for resolution in the immediate period ahead. Every district leadership must be held responsible to take the necessary political and organizational measures to overcome this problem. In fact, shifting the main attention of our membership to work in the key shops, industries, industrial cities and towns and working-class communities is of decisive importance if our Party is to play its role of participating in and leading the working class in the present and pending struggles.

Perhaps the outstanding weakness in the execution of the Convention decisions regarding concentration has been our failure or inability to mobilize our Party for sustained attention to this work. The "90% of time" to be devoted to industrial and concentration work called for by Comrade Winston fell flat in the face of actual practice. Were these decisions unrealistic? Did we overshoot the mark, so to speak? I do not think so. Often our decisions were cancelled out by a series of objective conditions that could have been overcome--especially if we had applied ourselves diligently and continuously to the tasks.

What then are the basic reasons why industrial concentration work remains the concern of a small number of individuals and is considered a departmental aspect of our leadership? The 1950 Convention Resolution indicated an answer to this question when it stated: "The fact that the Party is not yet predominantly composed of industrial workers becomes in itself a factor tending to pull the Party away from its concentration plans year after year."

But to leave this question at this point is inadequate. More concrete conclusions will have to be drawn. The role of the leadership in this connection is decisive. Our Party members, regardless of composition, will respond to correct policies when projected and fought for by the leadership. In my judgment there are five basic reasons why we have not been able to rally the Party on a sustained basis for concentration work. They are:

1. The National Committee did not wage a sufficient and consistent struggle to win the Party for its correct policies.
2. There are too many comrades in Party leadership whose knowledge and understanding of the issues confronting the working class is too abstract.

3. Insufficient integration of comrades from shops and trade unions in the policy-making bodies of the Party at all levels.
4. A style of work which swings from one campaign to another -- a style of work which demands quick results.
5. Periodic disruptions due to defense problems and the jailing of our leaders.

For years now the National Committee has emphasized the special role of the working class, and developed a sound concentration policy. Much of the work of the National Committee was geared in the direction of concentration. Industries were selected, coordinators chosen, tactical questions in these industries were periodically discussed, some campaigns were undertaken. But the application of this concentration policy was sporadic, and after a few spurts, things generally returned to "normal" and there was an inadequate struggle to make concentration a permanent feature and system of work in the Party. Districts were allowed to proceed too much on their own. During the days of the Open Letter, in the early thirties, a district organizer was removed from one of the key concentration districts for his failure to follow a concentration program. I am not advocating the removal of D.C.'s as a solution to this question but certainly we must wage a much more consistent struggle on the district level to realize the objectives of our concentration program.

If it is said that the composition of the Party membership has been a factor retarding the progress of our concentration plans as was stated in the 1950 Convention Resolution then an examination of the composition of our leading cadre is in order to see to what extent this has been a factor in holding up the work. Over the years there has been a system of work which has created two types of cadres in the Party. There are the so-called "inner-Party workers," and the so-called "mass workers." This mechanical division of our cadre has meant that some of our most devoted and loyal comrades have received a one-sided development -- one which is divorced from intimate contact with mass work. Many of these comrades hold important functions in district and national leadership. They are responsible for work which should be geared to the Party's concentration program. But this is not achieved. Their whole existence, political and social, is from one Party functionary to another. They almost never meet non-Party shop workers. They seldom come into contact with the rank and file Party members who are workers, except to issue instructions. Of course, such comrades are not solely responsible for the failure to carry out our concentration plans, but the role they play in leadership, especially in the absence of shop comrades on leading bodies, certainly helps to determine the outcome of the plans.

Two years ago there was quite a debate on this question in the Board of an important district. One comrade, a miner, who noted within the Board a number of comrades with non-proletarian background and no intimate ties with the workers, decided that the reason for the failure to follow a consistent concentration policy within the district was the predominance of

such comrades in leading posts. The Board rejected his position because it denied fatalistically the possibility that these comrades could come closer to the problems of the workers. In so doing, however, the Board realized that a serious problem had been posed.

If we are to make the basic change in our orientation to the working class, the Party must help all comrades to come closer to the needs and problems of the workers, and to participate in one form or another in mass activity. In some instances, also, comrades should be encouraged to go into industry.

In the past several years those who have the most intimate connections with the workers, comrades from the shops and trade unions, have been separated from leading bodies of the Party. The lack of their participation undoubtedly has had some effect on the work of the leading policy bodies. It is true that the present conditions of work create some real obstacles in the integration of shop workers in leading committees. But such obstacles are not insurmountable, provided we understand that our leading committees cannot fully meet their responsibility toward industry in the absence of such comrades. In the coming period we must change this situation.

Another way to change the quality of our leadership in concentration work is to overcome a division of labor that has grown up whereby Party functionaries give general political leadership and trade unionists guide the economic problems of the workers. In one district, a county organizer worked with a concentration shop club for one year. He built it up to meet regularly, conducted class and educationals, and acquainted the club with the general policies of the Party. When he was asked if he ever read the union contract and knew the conditions of the workers in the shop, he admitted he had never seen the contract. When negotiations took place in the shop he relied on the comrades in the club, and particularly on one who was the business agent, for all the thinking on the economic questions in the plant. Conversely, the full-time trade-union functionary never felt confident to discuss the political situation without the participation of the county organizer. This mechanical division of labor results in separating economics from politics, in weakening our theoretical and political leadership in the club because it is never applied to the concrete conditions and struggles that the workers face. This is but one of many such examples. What we must fight for are collective bodies that have the ability to give leadership to all problems of the workers, economic and political.

The concept that campaigns and drives for subs or funds, etc., are barriers to our concentration work must be rejected. True, there are some methods employed in campaigns which were obstacles to our concentration work, but this does not have to be. Campaigns organized by the Party must have real concentration objectives. They should be geared to meet our concentration needs and thus become a phase of activity which is part and parcel of our overall objectives in strengthening our base in the mass production industries where the majority of the workers are found. What

we must learn is the need to develop all our mass work, our Party building programs, our sale of literature and the press, in and among the workers in the concentration industries. This calls for planning our campaigns in a fashion which helps and is not in contradiction with industrial concentration.

Objective factors such as attacks on the Party, preoccupation with defense matters, the jailing of Party leaders, temporary dislocations in Party leadership, have contributed to sporadic approaches to our plans of concentration. Especially has this been true since the 1950 Convention. But it was not ordained that we should be distracted from what is the heart of all of our work. We did not think deeply enough about the repeated warnings of Comrade Foster when he insisted that we must not allow ourselves to be turned into a defense organization. The lessons he drew from the experiences of the I.W.W. did not sufficiently sink into our consciousness--especially among those who were not on trial or jailed.

The resolution of the National Committee analyzing the outcome of the 1952 elections placed sharply the necessity of shifting the main orientation of the Party in the communities toward the bourgeois-led mass organizations. This question must be seen in relation to our general political objectives, namely the building of a people's coalition under the leadership of labor. It must be seen, in the first place, as an auxiliary to our concentration work. Second, it must be viewed as a means of connecting ourselves with the workers, the masses of farmers, the Negro people, liberal and middle-class elements, youth and women's movements.

In the past year we have made some progress in strengthening this phase of our work, but on close examination, we find, with some exceptions in the Negro and youth fields, the work has proceeded haphazardly. Especially has this been true with respect to strengthening our ties with the working class. Whatever progress we note, with the exception of work in Negro people's organizations with few or no working class members. While not belittling these positive achievements, we must give major emphasis to the key aspect of work in bourgeois-led organizations which influence the broad mass of workers, the most important of which are in the Negro field and among the national groups.

Where there is the least progress is precisely among the national groups. These organizations are most important from the standpoint of the working class. The work here must be integrated into our concentration plans in every industry and in every district. The most important organizations must be selected and our national group comrades assigned to work there. Unless this is tackled in the most vigorous manner our concentration program will suffer.

There are many other problems regarding concentration, such as the work and functioning of shop clubs, organization forms to combine our community work with work in industry, cadre training, etc. We have singled out at this time the strengthening of existing shop clubs, the building of new shop clubs, the fight to improve the working class quality of our leadership and concentration on the national group organizations as the main links with which to move the chain. This new approach to a sound concentration policy is a relentless struggle to execute correct policies which have been worked out previously.